

Are You Crying?

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Summary: Today is the Wedding of the Hero of Oakvale and Briar Rose isn't sure she is ready for this.

Are You Crying?

"Are you crying?"

Briar Rose couldn't believe her eyes. She had only seen this mountain of a man before her cry on two other occasions and it had been heartbreaking. He was the Hero of Oakvale, after all. He had faced down that monster Jack of Blades.

The man laughed, a deep hearty laugh. "Well, am I not allowed to cry today?"

"I supposeâ€|. just feels weird."

"And why is that, Miss Rose?"

Suddenly Briar Rose felt very small. She was about to admit something to him that she never wanted to. She did not want him to know all she knew about him. He was special to her and she did not want to ruin that.

Especially not on his wedding day.

Maze had brought the boy in the dead of night. It had been one hell of an evening around the Guild. People were flying in and out and the Cullis Gate was never quiet. Things had just started to slow down about an hour before. The only ones left in the Map Room were the Guild Master, Thunder, and a very young apprentice known as Briar Rose.

This was not a typical night. Most nights, the Guild Master would require the apprentices to go to bed much earlier. Tonight, however, Briar had gotten lost in the confusion. She had been waiting to tell the Guild Master goodnight. As things quieted down, the Guild Master had offered to let her stay while he spoke with Thunder. Thunder and the Guild Master were waiting for Maze's arrival to discuss the evening's events.

As Maze appeared in the Cullis Gate, the silence in the room was shattered by gentle sobbing. Maze held a young boy in his arms, no more than 7 or 8. Briar Rose was only 12 herself. Still, the boy brought a strange energy with him. Although not all heroes used the power of Will regularly or offensively, they could all sense it. Looking at the child as he cried against Maze, everyone felt the power in the room. While the boy looked broken, his energy was calm, almost peaceful. Briar Rose felt torn.

As Maze surveyed the room, he spoke first to Thunder and the Guild Master. "I must speak with you both." Then noticing Briar Rose, he turned his attention. "Briar, could you take this lad up to a room and settle him into bed?"

Briar Rose was shaken at being addressed so directly by the Senior Mage of the Guild. He was in charge of the guild, after all, as the strongest hero. Shaking herself out of her shock, she looked back and carefully nodded.

As he deposited the boy to Rose, he turned to face the other two men in the room. Although he and Thunder had fought many times and served to push one another as rivals, they also had a great deal of respect for one another.

"That boy!" mused the Guild Master.

"Later. We have bigger problems at the moment." Maze cut him off.
"The boy came with me from Oakvale. There was an attack tonight by
bandits. Our old pal Twinblade was leading them. That was not the
biggest issue however. There was an energy thereâ€|one I have not
felt in quite some time. One whichâ€|well let's just say it concerns
me."

The look on the mage's face worried the Guild Master, the stress quickly showing on his face. Thunder felt the tension rising in himself. He did not scare easy, but anything that could put Maze on edge was worth being prepared for.

"Jack is back."

Briar Rose took the young boy up to the only empty bed she could find. He was like a walking zombie at this point. He had worn out all the tears he had, but broken, dry heaving sobs still came every couple of steps. She felt bad for him. Whatever had happened seemed to have really shaken him. 'of course' thought Rose, 'he could just be a wimp.'

She came into Whisper's room. Whisper was Thunder's little sister and was just starting her own journey at the Guild. Rose knew there was

an open bed in there. She carefully settled him into the bed, gently rubbing his head. As Whisper woke up and looked over, Rose put a finger to her lips to warn her to be quiet. Whisper knew better than to challenge Briar Rose and carefully walked across the room.

"Who is this?"

"I have no idea. Maze just brought him in. He just managed to cry himself to sleep." Rose stated as she carefully stood up from the edge of his bed.

"Hmmm, might be a tough time for him here at the Guild. Crying won't get him very far." Whisper smirked.

Rose smiled at the young apprentice. "Yeah!" She looked down at the young boy. His face was now as calm as his Will felt. It made her feel better. She wasn't sure if he would make it, nor what had brought him to this point, but she just hoped he would be safe. She went on back to her own room with the thought of his face on her mind.

The guild knew the story very soon of the boy who came in the night. Everyone knew he came from Oakvale, a town which was burnt down and attacked by bandits. Rose was first scared that when the story got out, especially him having been brought in crying, that he would find life at the Guild rough and lonely. She had found it that way herself.

Of course the boy had surprised many people. The first time someone teased him about the crying, he laughed. More than that, he quickly began to prove himself in his training. The boy was strong, quick, and smart. He could handle himself.

And time passed and they grew. Rose reached 18 and was preparing herself for the trials. She was a gorgeous woman now, but the term Briar Rose had come to mean something to many of the apprentices in the Guild. It had become a coming of age thing in recent years for the younger apprentices to try and figure out where Briar came from. At first it had been annoying, and Rose snapped on several young men who dared to try and find out. Rose had always been independent and her actions had led to many of the apprentices and even some young heroes to avoid her. She didn't really mind too much. With her trial just a few days away, she wouldn't be around to deal with it much longer any way.

Then she saw him. She had always kept an eye on the young boy, now carefully growing into his own. Maze had asked her to and that is what she had done. Today, he was coming to see her. She could see that determination in his green eyes that she had come to respect in him. She smirked as he saw her looking at him, but to his credit, his steps did not falter. He marched straight up to her.

"Rose, What is your real name?"

Rose laughed. "Briar Rose."

"Ok, where did Rose come from?" He shot back.

"My parents. Family name."

"And Briar?" He smiled back.

She grimaced for a second as he said it. It had become a nickname she lived by, but not one she particularly liked. It was handed down to her by a family who no longer accepted her. They weren't really her family anymore. The people here at the guild were well, as much as she let them be. The Guild Master was probably the one she was closest to. He was like a father.

He caught the grimace. "Rose, I'm sorry. Forget I asked."

She quickly replaced her smile, looking down at the boy who looked very sad for having hurt her. She laughed, bringing a smile back to his face. "Don't worry about it. Tell me though, why did you just come ask me? After as many heads as I have ripped off, most boys these days resort to trying to ask others or sneak into my room to find paperwork or something. Aren't you scared? How come you aren't a chicken?"

His smile grew brighter. "Not of you. I would rather the chickens get out of the way and just talk."

She smiled back. "Haha, fair enough Chicken Chaser. As for my name," her voice grew louder to make sure everyone in the courtyard could hear, "It will take someone very special to EVER get that info out of me. Maybe the man I plan on marrying."

As she strode away to continue her practice, the young apprentice smiled for a moment before turning back to his friends. "Chicken Chaser!" That smarted, but he knew it was coming. He would have to remember to thank Rose for that one.

Rose had gone on her way, easily passing her trials. She had gone a step further. Not only was she an amazing hero, but she was becoming an expert in the Old Kingdom. She had studied hard and over the past four years become an expert in her own right in a number of ways. Now she was heading back to the Guild. It would be her first visit in three years. She had been travelling Albion to learn all she could. She had exhausted the Guild Library during her training, so her most recent travels had been to find more reading material, learning all she could.

As she entered the Guild Map Room, she came across a tall blond haired man with shoulder length hair and some light scruff in place of a beard. He was facing away from her toward the map looking for quests as she entered the room. If this was the kind of hero in the guild these days, she would have to visit more often.

Hearing the Cullis Gate, he turned around, and she came face to face with those green eyes.

"He Rose." His voice was a deep rumble, soft yet solid. He was careful not to call her Briar Rose.

"Hey Chicken Chaser." She said, trying to hold back a laugh. It was

him. Ok, she had kind of fallen off of Maze's request over the past few years, but looking at him she figured it didn't matter. He had just finished his own trials recently and all was well. He had certainly grown up.

"What do you say we grab some food?"

"Haha, sure. Do you mind if we grab it here? As a new hero who hasn't made his fortune yet, it is about all I can afford." He said, looking a bit dejected.

She smiled. "My treat. Let's go, Chicken Chaser." She was heading out the door toward Bowerstone before he could even respond.

The chatted for a while, catching up on the past four years. He told her about beating Whisper, discovering his Will Power (this one shocked her. There were only a handful of true Will Users in the Guild), and his first quest to take out the Wasp Queen.

She felt impressed. He had done quite a bit for only having officially been a hero for three weeks. Of course she would not let him know that. "That's all, huh?" she smirked.

He grinned back. "Do tell, what has the great Hero Rose been doing for these past four years?"

So she dove into her story. She told of fights with Bandits, Wasps, Beetles, and hobbes up in the mountains while exploring some old castles and libraries. It had earned her the nickname "Protector of Albion's history" by some very bookish librarians. They both laughed at the corniness of the name, then she went on to tell him about her search to become an expert on the Old Kingdom.

"That is amazing Rose. You always were brilliant. The Guild needs people like you." He told her, easily displaying his pride in her efforts.

Rose felt herself blushing at that. "Thanks, but they really need more like Thunder, Maze, and the Guild Master. Probably more like youâ€|one day." She smirked at that last remark before following it up with, "Chicken Chaser."

The rest of the meal passed easily before the two made their way back to the Guild. After enjoying some time together and the banter back and forth, the two arrived back at the Guild Map Room. After staring for a moment at one another. Rose quickly broke the eyes contact and cleared her throat.

"Looks like there are some good quests. Which was you heading?"

He picked up a quest. "Looks like I'm heading south. You?"

She looked at the quest she had grabbed. "Looks like we are heading different ways again. I'm heading back toward Bowerstone. Ah well, see ya later Chicken Chaser." She was trying desperately to hide the disappointment she felt. She turned to head toward the door when she felt herself pulled into a hug.

"Maybe one day, Rose. In the meantime, don't be a stranger!"

Before she realized what had happened, he had let her out of the hug and was out the door. Feeling her cheeks turn red, Rose was glad she was alone in the Map Room. She took a few deep breaths before exiting herself toward her destination.

She didn't realize it would be years before she saw him again.

For Briar Rose, it had been a long couple of years. It had been another four years since she had seen him. She had made several trips back to the Guild to keep track of things. She wouldn't admit it to anyone else, but it was really about finding out about him. For a while it had all been good news. She had heard about him saving a farmer from bandits, a young boy from hobbes (in Hobbes Cave at that-wow). He had protected some travelers from balverines and made it back to Oakvale.

She wondered how that had gone. It didn't seem to matter too much as he had not stuck around. He kept pushing on right on down to Twinblades camp. Apparently something big had happened there because he had disappeared for a bit. When he returned, about two years after their last chat, it was with a new passion. He was a different man, or so everyone said. She didn't get a chance to see for herself.

After his return, now known as Lionheart, things had been quick. He had disappeared to Witchwood where he had saved an archeologist she had hidden there followed by taking out the White Balverine. He was becoming quite the household name. Everyone wanted to meet him. Sheâ€¦she just kept being just far enough away not to see him.

His adventures kept him moving. Next thing she knew, he was in the Arena. She knew Thunder had barely survived that challenge, and she was worried for him. Of course she should have known better. He took on that task easily enough and even spared Whisper in the end.

In his actions, Rose saw why he was becoming so beloved. Not only was that small boy growing into his own and becoming a powerful hero, but he was a good man. He took mercy and compassion into each of his quests. She visited Witchwood about a week after he left there and the kids just kept talking about seeing 'Chicken Chaser' again so they could play with him some more. She was touched if a bit confused why the kids kept calling him Chicken Chaser since he was such a big hero. She asked the Chief about it while she was there.

"I don't really know why the hero did that. But he was great with the kids. He is such a big guy that the parents were worried their kids would be scared of him. But he met them with a goofy grin and asked them to call him Chicken Chaser. Said something about a special little girl giving him the name."

Rose felt herself blush when she heard that. She thanked the Chief before she left to visit the arena herself.

The next news she got of him concerned her a bit. She had heard about Lady Grey, they Mayor of Bowerstone, coming on to him. She felt her stomach twist a bit when she heard that, but she wouldn't let anyone else know. She followed the stories coming from Bowerstone closely

and was incredibly relieved when she heard that a hero had run Lady Grey out of town for killing her sister. It even talked about the hero defeating The Thunder. That was an incredible feat in and of itself.

Then she saw it. There was a picture of him in the next paper with a woman kissing him on the cheek. That one hurt. She knew there was no good reason for it to hurt, but it did. So she took some quests to get away.

She would return to the guild a year later. As she came in, feeling refreshed and calm, she let out a final breath before entering the guild. She was ready for the Guild Master to let her know how much he missed her, maybe even see a few other people. As long as he wasn't there, it would all be alright.

The first thing she noticed was the quiet. The guild was never this quiet and calm. It worried her. She looked around for the Guild Master. Not seeing him, she took off for the courtyard. The Guild Master was out there, but not practicing. He was simply staring. He looked lost. She ran up to him.

"Whats wrong?"

The Guild Master snapped out of his lost thoughts. Seeing Briar Rose, he perked up. "Rose! I am so glad you cam back. How are y-"

She cut him off, "Yes yes, it is nice to see you too. I made it back safe and sound. Now please tell me whats wrong. I have not seen the guild this quiet ever and you looked so lost."

The smile on the Guild Masters face faltered and he let out an exasperated sigh. "Well, it is the young hero. He has been through a lot, but he always came out victorious. He overcame his anger and pain to visit Oakvale. He took on Twinblade who caused his pain to save his sister. He won in the arena just like his mother!"

Rose felt lost and knew she needed to step in. "Slow downâ€œ! What? His sister? Mother?"

The Guild Master let out another breath. He decided he should explain it all. "Rose," She liked it. The Guild Master and him were the only two who ever called her that. "Ok Rose, you must understand. There is a great powerâ€œ|a great evil that has been at work in Albion for the last decade. This power has for some reason focused on breaking that boy. You knew he was different the night he came in, right?"

Rose nodded her head as the Guild Master continued, "His mother is none other than the guild's own Scarlett Robe. She is the daughter of a long line of incredibly powerful heroes. The night that he was brought in, we all thought the family had died. You felt it in his Will then, it had been affected by a very dark mage. That mage is a man known as Jack of Blades. Jack is an ancient evil. He is incredibly dangerous and incredibly powerful.

"Well we learned a few years ago that not everyone had died in the attack. The boys father was sadly gone, but his sister lived. She had been taken to become a seerer by Twinblade. That is why the boy left

to take him on. We were all a bit concerned. Indeed each hero's journey is different, but we feared that the boy would do something drastic. He had always seemed so peaceful when he left. He did not, however, disappoint us. The boy proved his incredible fortitude and defeated Twinblade. Further, he spared Twinblade his life even though Twinblade was the cause of his father's death. And he saved his sister."

Rose sat down on the ground as she took all of this in. After a moment of silence she turned to the Guulg Master. "And you all still doubted him?"

The Guild Master looked ashamed. "I did not doubt his heart, I doubted his past. Yet despite all of that, he proved time and again to be more of a hero than anyone we had ever known. He showered Whisper mercy, and Thunder too. He saved his sister and so many of Albion's citizens. It was incredible."

As Rose took all of this in, her next question came out as a whisper.
"And his mother?"

"About a year ago, his sister called him. Apparently during that meeting, he learned that his mother was not only alive, but being held captive. He learned that his mother was a prisoner of Jack of Blades. For him, that was not an option. Two days after you left, he went on his way to Bargate Prison. While I had no doubt about his intentions, I was worried about his strength in facing Jack. Jack could defeat anyone in this guild and possibly the entire guild together. You should know about his strength, my dear. You have studied the Old Kingdom."

Rose did know the name, she knew all about the Court and what they had done. She didn't want to believe it, but seeing the Guild Masters reaction, she no longer doubted the legends. "And where is he now?"

"We don't know."

"Oh." It was all she trusted herself to say more. She didn't want to think about what it meant. He had already proven to be one of the strongest heroes, and if he had been gone for a yearâ€¦ of my. Then she broke down in tears. It started with one tear warming her cheek. As she reached up and felt the tear, realizing how cold she was, the flood gates broke. She wept openly and hard.

The Guild Master placed a comforting arm around her, leading her back in to the Guild and carefully to a room.

He was on his way down to help her out. It had been too long. He felt his body sag on the way. How badly he wanted to see her, for years now, but she was always one step away. Then the stuff with his mother.

He shivered at the memory. A Year in that jail had been bad. Not quite hell, but nothing he wanted to go through again. Now the Guild Master had him on his way to help Briar Rose prevent a summoning, whatever that meant. He arrived in the darkwood swamp and saw her

standing there. "Rose!" she jumped a little on hearing her name, looking over and seeing him. She jerked away to hide the mix of emotions. The anger, frustration, happiness, joy; all of it at once was a lot.

Just then, creatures began to rush her. He rushed to her side as they fought back to back. He kept casting spells, shooting like mad, and demonstrating some incredibly flourishes with his katana. She was impressed. No wonder he had been so successful in all of his quests.

As the first wave died down, she turned to look at him with a serious face. "You hold them off. I need to stop this summoning or we are in for a lot of trouble."

He set his jaw. "Don't worry Rose, they won't touch you."

She smiled as she turned back to her work, knowing he meant it.

After what felt like an eternity, the battle was over. She had stopped the summoning and he, true to his word, ensured that not a single creature had touched her. It felt safe knowing he had her back. She slumped down, about to collapse from exhaustion, when he caught her in his arms. It was a shock to him when she slapped him. Feeling her handprint on his face, he looked into her eyes.

She was smiling. "Don't ever leave like that again! Chicken Chaser." As she said that, she cupped his cheek in her hand. Then her eyes closed and she blacked out.

He quickly teleported them back to the Guild. As they arrived, he rushed her to her room and settled her down into her bed. As she slept, he went to get her some food from the kitchen. He rushed past the Guild Master who was congratulating him. He told the Guild Master thank you and what had happened to Rose before rushing past him to get food.

When he returned from the Kitchen, the Guild Master was standing close to Rose, casting a Will Spell. There was a look of concentration and frustration on his face. The hero stepped in. "I already tried that. With all do respect, Master, perhaps we should just let her sleep?"

The Guild Master was a bit shocked on hearing this wisdom from his young apprentice. "I do believe you are correct. Let's leave her in peace."

As they existed the room, the Guild Master turned to the hero. "I must ask, though, where did you learn that spell?"

"A year trapped in a prison cell leaves a great deal of time for concentration. I spent time training and practicing Will a great deal; at least when the guards would allow it."

The Guild Master offered him a look of compassion and pain. "That sounds like a rough year, particularly knowing your mother is so close. I apologize."

"Nothing to apologize for. A year older, a year stronger, a year

calmer."

The Guild Master stared into those green eyes. He saw the strength that the Lionheart had come to be known not only around the guild but around Albion for.

Rose woke up in her room with a plate of food on the nightstand beside her bed. She thought back to the day before. She hadn't been eating or sleeping well, working overtime to get things ready for the fight against Jack of Blades. Being the Old Kingdom expert, she was the best prepared for this study. She knew she had been overworking herself, but she needed it. It had taken her mind off of him. She had arrived at the darkwood just in time to stop the summoning and He had arrived. It had been a shock and had it not been for them fighting for their lives, she would have fainted then and there.

Now she was back in the Guild. How had she gotten there? She was not in her leather armor anymore eitherâ€|well that was embarrassing. Suddenly there was a knock at the door.

"Come in."

The door slowly opened and she saw that brunette hair peer around the door followed by those green eyes. "Good evening Rose, how are you?"

"I'm fineâ€¦ wait, did you say evening?"

He looked away from her on that. "Yes. You have been asleep for about a day."

"But - "

He interrupted her. "Rose, I spoke with the Guild Master. He mentioned how hard you have been working. We both agreed that you needed the rest. I added a bit of a sleeping portion to my will healing spell when we arrived." He added the last bit sheepishly.

She glared at him. "Well I don't have time to be lying around. Jack of Blades is back and I need to be helping us get ready for him."

He perked up at that, but there was death in his eyes. The sudden pressure of his will scared her for a moment before he seemed to get control over himself.

"Don't worry about that Rose. I know he is back. I have seen him."

"You have?" she asked him incredulously.

"I have. It is my family he is after, after all." He stopped for a moment, then brightened as he turned to look at her. "As for preparing for him, you have done some excellent work. My mother has been pouring over your notes and said you know more than she does. She has been his prisoner for several years, so that was pretty high praise."

Rose shook her head. "You are just being polite. As if I could possibly know more from books than *Scarlett Robe*."

He laughed his deep laugh. "It's true. I'll bring her down to tell you herself."

Rose couldn't believe it. She had lost him AGAIN. He had gone to bring Scarlett Robe down to meet her just in time to see his mother being kidnapped. Naturally he had to go after her and Rose wouldn't deny him that. She just wished he would have let her come help him. Of course that wasn't going to happen. Weaver had placed guards at her door and had an apprentice checking on her every half hour to make sure she was still resting.

Then all hell broke loose. He returned with Maze in his arms, dead. As the Guild Master met him in the Map Room, everyone knew things had changed. Maze, the great Mage Hero, had been the strongest hero in the guild for years. For nearly two decades he had been the leader of the Heroes Guild. In one trip, The young boy from Oakvale, who had been brought in by the old mage, had defeated him.

Rose arrived on the scene quietly taking things in. Maze had really turned on them? The hero looked broken. He had been losing family left and right. His mother had been kidnapped, he lost his sister as he fought Maze, and now Maze, who had almost been a father to him, he had to kill. While all the records pointed to Maze betraying the Guild, the hero knew better. He carefully laid Maze down respectfully in the Guild, commanding everyone to leave the body alone, and left to explore Maze's room.

Upon his return, it became clear that there indeed was more than thought. He had discovered a book, a journal of Maze's. Maze discussed his plans. He had known that Jack was back and that He, as the supposed strongest of the heroes, was not powerful enough to defeat Jack. He had been helping Jack with the plan of using the sword to defeat Jack.

With this realization, the Guild offered Maze the proper respect, at least when they could. For now, it was time to fight Jack. He had been activating the ancient focus sites. It was time for action. It was time to prove why they were called heroes.

Rose had followed him through to battle toward the first focus site. Watching him fight, it soon became no wonder that he had been the one to defeat Maze. He was stronger than Thunder, better with a Bow than anyone I had seen, and his Will power outshone even Maze. He was indeed a hero.

"You go ahead. You need to take on Jack. We'll handle these!" She shouted out to him.

"Are you sure?" He asked, his green eyes coming to meet hers, filled with concern.

"I promise. Now deal with him!" Chicken Chaser." She hid my frustration at realizing he had to do this alone behind the joke. He gave her a brief smile and turned to track after Jack.

Several hours later, after a great deal of fighting, The heroes had defeated the creatures in their way. As soon as Rose had cleared everyone out of her way, she went immediately back to the Guild. And it was in shambles. She saw The Guild Master collapsed against a wall. She rushed over to his side, tears filling her own eyes.

"Weaver! Come on now old man, don't leave me!"

A Small grunt emitted from the old man. "Don't think you'll get rid of me that easily young lady." He coughed for a few minutes, the pain from each one clearly showing on his face.

"Jack is down there. He arrived with Scarlett and Theresa. After he hit me, he opened that room and took them with him."

The look of terror on her eyes told Weaver that Rose was scared.

"Yes, he followed them down there too. Our hopes now lie with the strength of that young boy from Oakvale. Today we will discover if Maze was right."

They sat. Rose made Weaver as comfortable as possible and they waited.

After what felt like an eternity, Rose felt energy pouring forth from the door. She felt someone coming closer and she knew that trouble was coming. She prepared herself for war, slipping to her feet as she drew her knife. In a fighting stance, she faced the opening. She felt the Will power coming closer and bearing down on her. Then, she felt something more. She knew there was power there, but she felt something she had forgotten about over the past 15 years. It was a calmness that reminded her of the hero. With this realization, she noticed there were two people now at the door. One was the hero and one was a blind woman in red. Feeling both thrilled and sad, Rose relaxed out of her fighting stance. She came over the meet the hero as he introduced the blind lady.

"Rose, I would like for you to meet Theresa, My sister."

For some reason, this made Rose feel even more relaxed. As she helped settle Theresa down, she saw the hero facing the door to the room below. She came up behind him and heard a sound she had not expected. She placed her hand on his shoulder as he cried.

He stood stoically and if she was not so close, she never would have known he was crying.

It had been another year and a half, and what a busy year and a half it had been. The hero had taken his place as the leader of the Guild, but left the running to the Guild Master. He had spent time travelling all over Albion, trying to get stronger while also trying to set life right. He had lost his mother in the fight with Jack

after just having gotten her back. More than that his sister had left soon after, needing her own space. When all was said and done, the new leader of the Heroes Guild felt lost himself.

He had returned after a year to the guild to find things not necessarily in a good place. Scythe had appeared to ask for the guild's help. Apparently Jack was not exactly gone. Lots of travel had led the hero to gaining the Tear of Avo, a powerful sword which they hoped would allow him to finally defeat Jack. He had also worked with Rose to unlock the route to Snowspire. After meeting Scythe, he had travelled to the necropolis in order to learn how to activate the oracle. This was followed by more work with Rose, learning about the spirits he needed in order to open the Bronze Gate. The first few had been easy choices, taking the old Arena Champion rather than Thunder, and Nostro rather than the Guild Master. Then came the choice that he thought would be hardest.

Rose had informed him that he needed the Heroine's soul. She mentioned that Scarlett Robe would be a choice, or herself. Rose offered this last piece with pain in her voice. It was a tough choice, or so she thought it would be.

Of course after watching, or rather feeling, the hero cry at the loss of his mother, Rose knew she would gladly offer herself. Not that that would make death any easier, but if it saved him pain, she would do it. She loved him, after all.

"You can always take mine."

She said it so sincerely, so gently. He knew she was offering to take his mother's place. But he couldn't do that. He had already lost his mother, his sister, even Maze. There was no way he was losing her too.

"So Scarlett Robe, you say? I'll be back."

She was waiting. It was hard. Frustrating. Not new, necessarily. She had been waiting for him, one way or another, for 16 years. That didn't make it any less frustrating. She stood staring at the Bronze gate he had passed through.
Waiting.

He was fighting for his life. Her was fighting Jack of Blades again. Of course this time, Jack was a dragon. He wondered what they would call him after this. "The Dragon Slayer" He laughed at himself. Here he was fighting for his life, making jokes with himself. What a mess.

There was only one name he was worried about being called again.

He kept fighting. He was using Will to an extent her never knew possible. More than that was his use with the bow and sword. It was a long, drawn out battle. As he saw the dragon fall one final time, he knew he had won. He could feel Jack's spirit in the Mask he carried. Jack was calling to him. Jack was offering more power than the hero

could ever imagine. Jack put pictures of having his family back. It was nice.

Then the hero felt something else. He felt his Will surround him like never before. He could feel life around him, calling to him. He had always been able to feel other Will users, but this was new. He could feel them all, no matter where they were. And one in particular was calling to him. He stared at the mask, at the vision it had shown him.

Then he heard it. The name he wanted to be called. He smiled.

VX

She tensed as she heard the Bronze Gate creak open again. She stared trying to see who and what would come forth. Her nerves quickly faltered as she saw him come out. It was what she had feared and expected. The man strode toward her, calmer than she had ever seen him before. He stood taller and stronger than she imagined possible. And she felt weak.

He came to stand directly in front of her. Rose, not knowing what else to do, collapsed against him in a hug. It was all she could do to keep herself from crying. He carefully hugged her back. After a few minutes, with her emotions under control, she stepped back.

"Is it over?"

He nodded.

"For sure this time? I can't stand another run against him."

He laughed, helping her to relax. Then she reached up and slapped him. He gave her a shocked look.

With her palm still softly against his face. "Don't do that to me againâ€|Chicken Chaser." He smiled.

As he looked at her, she smiled back. "So Rose, I have always wanted to know something."

"And what is that?"

He looked down at his feet. It was an odd thing, he thought, for the "Lionheart", the "Dragon Slayer", the "Hero of Oakvale" to be afraid. But this was a subject her had not broached in a long time.

"Rose, what is your name?"

_End of Flashback!

VX

"Well, you see, ummâ€| "Rose was at a loss to answer his question. How did she tell him she knew every time he had cried and also knew how incredibly strong he was? How did she say that she loved him?

"Rose, calm down." He smiled at her as he stood up.

"Look, I know you don't like to cry. Iâ€|I saw you cry two other

times and yet walk away as if they were nothing. You are an incredible person. You are a great man and I never know how to interact with you. You are powerful, brilliant, and kind. The world needs you. Iâ€|. "

He smiled at this, tears still glistening in his eyes. "Yes Rose?"

"I need you. And I love you." As she finished this, she let out her breath and collapsed on the couch next to him.

He let out a great laugh. "Thank you Rose, I needed that. For the record, I am crying for happiness. Today is a very good day for that I figure. Now, if you will excuse me!"

As he stood to leave, Rose suddenly felt angry and small. "Wait a second, is that all you have to say to me?"

He stopped and looked back at her thoughtfully. "No, I have plenty more, but it is bad luck for the Groom to see his bride on their wedding day. I figure I am already pushing my luck. I will see you at the altar dear."

He turned to walk away, stopping as he reached the door. "And, I love you too Bria Ruth Rose. I love you, my Briar Rose"

After he had left her standing in Snowspire, he had gone straight to the Guild. There was someone he needed to talk to before he could ask her his question. As he entered the Guild, he saw the Guild Master standing there smiling.

"Yes, my son?"

"Masterâ€œ Weaver. I would like to ask you something."

"Go ahead"

"Weaver, I am here to ask for your blessing. We both know she would only be insulted if I asked for your permission. You are, however, the man whose opinion she respects more than anyone else I know. Therefore, I would like to ask for your blessing in asking Rose for her hand in marriage."

Weaver looked thoughtfully at the young man before him. "Ah, I see. I appreciate that you understand her independence. Before I answer, I have just one question. What is her name?"

The hero smiled at this. "Bria Ruth Rose. Her family called her Briar. Since it came from her family, who wanted nothing to do with her hero life, she rather hates it. That is why I call her Rose."

Weaver offered a knowing smile. "You know, I think there may be at least one man whose opinion she respects more than mine."

End

file.